

# **SAMS Monograph**

**Red DIME: Dissecting the Bolshevik Liquidation Campaign in  
the Ferghana Valley against the Basmachi Resistance**

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# **SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES**

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## **Abstract**

**Red DIME: Dissecting the Bolshevik Liquidation Campaign in the Ferghana Valley against the Basmachi Resistance** by John P. Riordan, 42 pages.

This monograph delves into the Bolshevik campaign to liquidate the Basmachi Resistance in the Ferghana Valley Section of Central Asia. The Bolsheviks employed a precursor to the modern day D.I.M.E construct in order to overcome early policy missteps. The author uses archival documents from the Ferghana Oblast State Archives that he gathered during his Fulbright Scholar Research during 2002-2003.

By utilizing illustrative examples of Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic initiatives, it is possible to learn about the evolution of policy as the Bolshevik authorities struggled to regain the initiative against the Basmachi Resistance. These lessons of the Bolshevik counter insurgency against the native Basmachi resistance remain remarkably applicable as Governments face similar challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## Introduction

The Soviet liquidation campaign against the native Basmachi resistance in former Tsarist regions of Turkistan (modern day Central Asia) merits renewed attention and analysis in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Policy makers, scholars, and military officials search for relevant historic parallels and applicable lessons while attempting to shape a successful path for the current United States engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. A vigorous historical exploration of the last century's successful irregular warfare campaigns invariably points to the fledgling Soviet Union, and the Bolshevik Government's decade-plus battle to liquidate a native resistance (commonly referred to as the Basmachi resistance) that peppered wide swaths of the Central Asian landscape.

One theme that consistently emerges during research of this campaign centers on egregious shortcomings in initial Bolshevik policy toward Central Asia, which not only stoked the existing native resentment but also provided fuel for increased Basmachi activity against Bolshevik instruments of power. Two plus years (1918-1920) of ill-conceived and disjointed policy implementation and under-supervised military action left the Soviet regime scrambling to refocus the Central Asian campaign. Forced to reframe and significantly alter the Basmachi liquidation strategy and tactics, the Soviet authorities' critical analysis of the environment at both the national and provincial level produced a revamped course of action that ultimately prevailed over the Basmachi resistance. Thus, a thorough examination of the Soviet liquidation of the Basmachi resistance offers an excellent lesson in 20<sup>th</sup> Century non-linear engagement. Fresh, forward-thinking Soviet authorities arrived on the scene to address early policy shortcomings with the deft implementation of shrewdly-crafted, culturally-modified policy that ultimately led to a victorious campaign against the Basmachi resistance. This remarkable display of governmental dexterity in the face of adversity continues to resonate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is especially true

when examining a government's ability to adjust and eventually correct initially flawed policy against non-state adversaries prior to veering irrevocably off course. It is uncanny how direct certain parallels are to 21<sup>st</sup> Century US engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, and remarkable that the US is learning similar lessons that the Soviets encountered and were forced to grapple with in the Ferghana Valley region of Central Asia almost a century ago.

Only a handful of Western Scholars have studied the underlying themes of this decade-plus engagement. The best include Martha Brill Olcott's "The Basmachi or the Freeman's Revolt in Turkestan, 1918-24", Glenda Fraziers "Basmachi", Marie Broxups "The Basmachi", and Robert F. Baumann's "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan".<sup>1</sup>

This monograph concentrates on Soviet efforts within the general borders of the fiercely-contested Ferghana Valley<sup>2</sup> of Central Asia during 1920-1923. Utilizing illustrative original source materials gathered at the Ferghana Oblast State Archives during Fulbright Scholar research in 2002-2003, I present rarely-explored examples to explain what is essentially a precursor to the modern day DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) construct. The illustrative examples show the evolution of Soviet authorities' efforts to recalibrate strategy and tactics across the full spectrum of the DIME construct, including a fundamental reformulation of the application of soft and hard power in order to reshape the environment and regain the initiative from the Basmachi. The "Red" DIME construct introduced and refined from late 1920 through 1923 in the Ferghana Valley allowed for the initiative to gradually, yet irrevocably shift in favor of the Soviets in their battle to liquidate the Basmachi resistance in the Ferghana Valley and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> For Background on the Ferghana Valley, See Appendix.

This monograph also delves into under or otherwise unexplored aspects of the Soviet effort to liquidate the native Basmachi resistance in the Ferghana Valley. This includes a look at the role of Soviet aviation in the Ferghana campaign, marked by the first-ever nighttime air raid in all of Central Asia by Red Airplanes based out of the Ferghana (formerly Skobelev) Aerodrome in 1921. This monograph further analyzes rare examples of Ferghana Valley Basmachi counterpropaganda against the Soviet authorities and the Soviet methods used in the Ferghana Valley for reintegrating repentant Basmachi. Finally, the monograph presents evidence of systematic hostage taking aggressively employed by the Soviet Authorities (including direct archival reference to a hostage taking directive by Comrade Trotsky) in order to mitigate linkages with native support and ultimately crush the Basmachi resistance.

## **Tsarist Administration and the Rise of the Bolsheviks**

The Tsar and his armies had conquered and subsequently incorporated Central Asia into the Russian Empire in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At the time, this impressive feat conjured up images of Tsarist military prowess and acumen, and put the international community, including the British Empire, nearby in India, on notice. In Central Asia, the native inhabitants lived under the Tsarist yoke for almost half a century prior to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that eventually swept through all corners of the Russian Empire. During this period of Tsarist rule, it was the first Governor-General of Russian Turkestan, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman, policy of non-interference that allowed for the overwhelmingly Islamic religious beliefs of the natives to not be overtly challenged or overly infringed upon. Most Russian officials viewed Islam with suspicion, and believe it to be backward and potentially dangerous, but left it generally unhindered.<sup>3</sup> With

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<sup>3</sup> Manz, Beatrice Forbes, *Central Asia Uprisings in the Nineteenth Century: Ferghana Under the Russians*, 281.



Islam relatively unmolested by the Tsarist authorities, especially outside the Russian seats of power in the main Central Asia cities, the native inhabitants of the vast rural areas of the territories had little direct Russian contact or impediments to their daily routine. The greatest impact of the Russian arrival was in the economic sector, as the resource laden region was cultivated for cotton and livestock. To be sure, grievances existed, and certain slivers of the population actively agitated while others passively chafed at rule by infidels. However, serious disturbances generally did not hinder this colonizer - colonizee relationship with the exception of the 1898 Andijan uprising, and societal turbulence was limited to small-scale intra-ethnic grievances and banditry.<sup>4</sup>

The overall situation in Central Asia swiftly deteriorated between 1916 and 1918, while the attention of the Tsar and his Army were firmly focused on fighting World War I. A desperate Tsarist decree for the conscription of Central Asians, coupled with a volatile mixture of economic uncertainty and political instability led directly to an increasingly aggressive confrontation with the native population. The relative balance that had existed in Tsarist Central Asia over the past 50 years was in peril as the Russian Empire edged closer to the precipice. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution put a new Marxist administration into power and shattered the fragile equilibrium that had been cultivated by Tsarist predecessors in the region. Widespread repudiation of Bolshevik rule through active and direct resistance set the stage for a battle of power in Central Asia. Native Central Asians, from nomad to city dweller, farmer to mullah, chafed at the abrasive transition to Bolshevik rule. During this time, irregular bands of native resistance fighters, known as

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<sup>4</sup> Manz suggests that most of the Ferghana region disturbances had their origins not in protest against conditions under Russian rule or even the existence of non-Muslim rulers, but stemmed from the structure and politics of the Kokand Khanate that had earlier controlled the area. Power under the khans had been achieved and maintained not through orderly mechanisms, but through violence. Manz comments that the Andijan Uprising “was neither well planned nor carefully organized”. In Andijan it was lead by Madali Ishan, as he led a band of almost 2000 against the Russian barracks. Manz describes how they entered the barracks while the soldiers slept and killed twenty-two people, wounding anywhere from sixteen to twenty more. They were quickly turned back by the better equipped Russians and fled. Carelessness rather than tactical acumen seemed to be the main culprit, which led to a thorough review of Russian policy in the region.

Basmachi, began to challenge Bolshevik rule throughout Central Asia. They were typically lead by an individual called a Kurbashi. Unprepared for what they encountered, the newly formed Bolshevik forces in Central Asia struggled to formulate a unified response.

## **Red DIME**

The DIME acronym stands for Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, and is defined by Joint Forces Command as “Areas of national power that are leveraged in ‘effects-based’ operations against an adversary’s vulnerabilities identified by Operational Net Assessment, and targeted against his will and capability to conduct war.”<sup>5</sup> FM 11-3 captures the essence of the DIME concept, stating “The instruments of national power-diplomatic, informational, military, and economic-complement and reinforce each other. Army forces enhance their effectiveness through close coordination with interagency partners. By understanding the capabilities of other agencies, senior- and mid-level commanders can add diplomatic, informational, and economic depth to their military efforts. Conversely, U.S. military capabilities allow other agencies to interact with foreign powers from a position of strength and security. Synchronizing military power with other instruments of national power substantially improves the joint force's strategic capabilities.”<sup>6</sup>

The young Bolshevik administration in 1920 found itself confronted with the nearly insurmountable task of addressing the negative ramifications created by over two years (1918-1920) of flawed national and provincial level policy across Central Asia. Yet Moscow’s desired strategic end state remained a firm and secure hold on the territories of Turkistan, as Bolshevik authorities believed they could utilize this region as a platform to further spread the October

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<sup>5</sup> United States Joint Forces Command Glossary: <http://www.jfcom.mil/about/glossary.htm> (Accessed 12/14/07).

<sup>6</sup> United States Army, FM 1-3: <http://www.army.mil/fm1/chapter3.html> (Accessed 12/16/07).

Revolution. Confronted with the very real possibility of losing their tenuous hold on Central Asia, this period experienced intense internal debates by Bolshevik authorities of all levels. This in turn produced uncharacteristically adaptive and dynamic courses of action that broke from previously rigid Bolshevik policy. This was certainly the case in the contentious Ferghana Valley region, as seen throughout the deliberations and decisions, statistics, and trends<sup>7</sup> recorded in provincial, regional, and national level documentation from the Ferghana Oblast State Archives. The specificity of the illustrative examples brought forth by provincial level documentation provides additional clarity to the formation of Red DIME strategy and tactics as the monograph navigates through the Soviet effort to regain the initiative against the Basmachi and reshape the environment in their favor.

## **Diplomatic**

The Diplomatic component of DIME was integral to Red DIME, affecting Information, Military, and Economic operations and fashioned to address key errors in early Ferghana Valley policy. The previous Tsarist regime refined its diplomatic efforts toward Central Asia territories as needed, but basically made an effort not to upset the local culture nor challenge local religious beliefs and legal systems already in existence. They allowed religious courts and law that didn't overtly interfere with Tsarist Russian administration in the Ferghana Valley.

In the aftermath of the October Revolution, Bolshevik forces fought to regain control of the Turkistan territory. The chaotic transition from a hands-off Tsarist regime to an aggressively assertive Bolshevik assumption of authority in the Ferghana Valley and the provinces resulted in revolt. The Bolsheviks responded with a disjointed campaign to establish authority over an increasingly disgruntled native population. The initial Bolshevik authorities actively intervened in

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<sup>7</sup> Trends are the movement of a variable over time. Trends document ongoing changes to variables and allow for projections of the characteristics of an operating environment at a future point in time.

local affairs, declaring it their business to reshape, not just administer, the region.<sup>8</sup> At first, the Bolshevik apparatchiks attempted to transform Central Asia by simply repeating the anti-religious campaigns that had succeed in European Russia. Islam was deeply entwined in the fabric of Central Asia. Thus, targeting the largest and wealthiest native landowners for resource redistribution affected more often than not individuals affiliated with native religious institutions. This resulted in an early frontal assault by the Bolsheviks on the most influential segment of the native population, which led to an invigorated resistance movement drawn from all segments of society.

The Bolshevik assumption of power in Central Asia was a political, economic, and social revolution. The Bolshevik authorities called for the immediate nationalization of all land, including the waaf (clerically owned) lands; an action which threatened the power of the historically empowered religious leaders. The Soviet authorities in Tashkent introduced anti-religious legislation which outlawed Koran schools and closed all Shari' a (religious) courts. The social tensions implicit in these unprecedented actions were exacerbated by the previous isolation of Central Asia from even the most moderate ideas.<sup>9</sup> In a short period of time, local and regional Bolsheviks, generally unversed in the society and culture of the Ferghana Valley and unwilling or unable to recognize seething native resentment, managed to galvanize major segments of the Ferghana Valley population into lending support or taking up arms with the Basmachi resistance.

Immediately prior to and during 1921, tentative strides in addressing shortcomings allowed for an effort to ameliorate relations with the severely antagonized local population. Bolshevik authorities at the provincial and regional level recognized the need for focused and systematic analysis of the Ferghana Valley environment, which ultimately reframed the struggle and reinforced DIME nodes and linkages with the native population. In addition, this process

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *The Basmachi or Freeman's Revolt in Turkistan 1918-1924*, 352-353.

served to initially diminish and over the long term discredit the sizable influence Basmachi exerted over the local population. Soviet authorities began to invest in the idea of re-evaluating the shaping of the Ferghana Valley environment prior to achieving the ultimate end state of a vanquished Basmachi resistance. If Bolshevik-inspired Socialism would ever permeate every facet of Central Asian society, some long held Bolshevik beliefs needed to be modified or de-emphasized. For the environment to transition to one agreeable to Bolshevik aims and goals, the Red DIME construct would effectively engage not only the bands of Basmachi, but also reinvigorate the effort to address the root causes of Basmachi success. The effort to recast the native population as the center of gravity began to resonate among Bolshevik authorities. The Red DIME effort aimed at reframing early Bolshevik decisions with the intent of reclaiming native popular opinion and support for Soviet efforts. This soon developed into a focused Bolshevik effort to marginalize the Basmachi resistance by negating native support for the Basmachi. The Bolsheviks were keenly aware that this could only be accomplished by adroitly employing all elements of Soviet power across the Red DIME.

An archival report from the members of the Turkistan Central Legislative Committee, dated 15 June 1922, outlines the reframed struggle against Basmachi at the provincial level. It further discusses future strategy and tactics. The increased Bolshevik focus on political engagement and maneuvering at the provincial level is evident throughout the document, along with the stress placed on fundamental Soviet policy concessions to assuage tensions produced by earlier attempts to force-feed Soviet dogma to native Ferghana Valley inhabitants. The potent mixture of anti-bourgeois and anti-religious fervor that had resonated during the October Revolutions in the Russian regions was met with open disdain across wide swaths of Central Asia. The empowerment of the working class continued to be a successful slogan where the workers were concentrated in significant numbers, but the message fell flat throughout Central Asia due to low native employment in industry. Furthermore, the direct challenge to the primacy

of the Islamic courts, institutions, and landholdings, ingrained within Central Asian society, led directly to a ground swell of popular support for regional bands of Basmachi resistance.

Increasingly, Bolshevik officials with a less zealous outlook appeared in the Central Asian theater. These officials tended to be more inclined toward a pragmatic and adaptive approach concerning policy creation and implementation. As this new cadre increasingly took the reins of power in the Ferghana Valley in the early 1920's, they replaced early Bolshevik ideologues unwilling or unable to evolve to the new paradigm. While this new cadre generally consisted of firm believers in the principles of the October Revolution, they also understood the need to reframe problems through the prism of cultural context, and brought with them increased awareness of the Central Asian operating environment. The regional authorities took stock of the situation across the full spectrum of the DIME construct, and came to understand the negative psychological effect their predecessors' unbending policies had on the native population. This recognition allowed for a greater appreciation of the connection between policies inadvertently fueling the Basmachi resistance. The European approach that had been successfully employed during the October Revolution needed significant modification in order to find cultural context in an Islamic environment, and this would necessitate a major Diplomatic endeavor to right the flawed approach in the Ferghana Valley region.

Seeking to regain their momentum, the Bolshevik authorities in the region gave increased freedoms to the population. For example, local authorities provided special tax deductions for land transactions, and with national-level approval, permitted the return of Shari'a law. Additional measures created a variety of opportunities for small manufactures and traders, while the Bolsheviks also increased freedom of travel along the railroad network, the vital economic lifeline. All of these decisions collectively brought about the desired paradigm shift in strategy and tactics in the struggle against Basmachi. Bolshevik success diminished support for the Basmachi resistance.

Politically, The Bolsheviks had to penetrate the local population and turn it from supporting the Basmachi resistance. To reestablish and strengthen lines of communication with the average native and regain local support was a tall order, and hinged upon an unprecedented Red DIME effort in the Ferghana Valley. The new Soviet Diplomatic strategy centered upon relaxing, freezing, or simply discarding unpopular or misunderstood policy. The Bolsheviks marshaled the full spectrum of resources to win back the population and reach goals in the region. This included changing noteworthy religious and economic policy, as previous Soviet policy remained a key rallying point for Basmachi supporters. The Soviet authorities in the Ferghana Valley believed uneducated or undereducated people would be prone to follow the Basmachi. However, by sticking to their word regarding the relaxation of previous policy and increasing support to the native population, the Soviet authorities wagered that the majority of the population would come to realize that similar promises by the Basmachi were rarely if ever fulfilled. This equation was the key piece of revamped Soviets policy and was increasingly backed by the might of the young Soviet Union. The Basmachi resistance would have trouble keeping pace as Moscow's resources and attention slowly shifted from the successful battle with the White forces to the battle for supremacy in Central Asia.

As the Soviet authorities predicted, it eventually dawned on the population that the local Basmachi no longer decided what freedoms the population received. Instead, it was up to the goodwill of the Bolsheviks, the leading and ruling party of the region. As the years progressed, enhanced political maneuvering ensured that the Basmachi slowly lost their grip on the population, devastating the foundation of Basmachi resistance and causing their numbers to shrink and native sympathy to fade. Increasingly, diplomacy also played a role in cajoling members of Basmachi bands and even entire Basmachi bands to come over to the Soviet side.

Despite progress there were still various kinks in Soviet effort. The effectiveness of the Soviet-sponsored local militias in the villages remained a problem. While the diplomatic plan called for increased emphasis on recruiting local policeman from the native population, this was

difficult to put into practice. The Soviet authorities implemented additional policy to allow for extra training and educating local militia while providing financial incentives. This attracted a steady flow of native people to help bring peace and stability to the region. The archives show the belated Soviet acceptance that native population would rather support and trust the militia hailing from their respective region. Unless the Soviets continued to focus on sustainability, and completed the training and educating of the natives, they felt that they would not be able to fully stamp out the Basmachi. In addition, to secure continued sympathy from the people, the Soviet authorities needed to restore credibility to the rule of law by establishing a working justice system. Native's discussions with Bolshevik authorities disclosed the fact that the population longed for the days when it had rule of law and an active justice system.<sup>10</sup>

The diplomatic effort received its greatest test in the Namangan region of the Ferghana Valley. This region continued to be a chronic security problem in the Bolshevik Ferghana Valley policy throughout 1921 and 1922. One of the most significant Kurabashi (a respected leader of a regional or village Basmachi band) in the Namangan region, Rahmankula and his substantial band of Basmachi created significant trouble for the Soviet authorities. He put their revamped Red DIME efforts to the test by impeding Soviet political efforts to win over the population. At a meeting of the Revolutionary Committee [UGOREVCOM] in Sept of 1922, Bolshevik frustration in the assessment is evident:

It is exceedingly difficult to work with the population in this region, because Rahmankula [Kurbashi] portrays himself as kind and benevolent to the population. He and his Basmachi ask only for 10% of the natives' income, and they assist in the production of bread for his soldiers and [sewing] emblems for his Military. Overall, [the speaker] laments the local population has almost no trust in our [Soviet] intentions, as the local population doesn't believe in the sustainability of building a Soviet Regime. Locals say that when the Soviets [Military detachments] leave for one second, Kurbashi Rahmankula and his band will immediately return and kill all those that supported the Soviets. He did

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<sup>10</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 139, sheet 40.



this many times before. The locals have lost faith in the Soviet's ability to manage the situation. Peace is only possible if Rahmankula is terminated.<sup>11</sup>

While the provincial authorities in the Namangan region had instituted an effort to connect with the locals and bring locals over to the Soviet side, they came to understand that this process would be time consuming and required political patience and increased vigilance to persevere through multiple Basmachi-inflicted setbacks.

Following early Soviet mistakes in the Ferghana Valley, intense diplomatic efforts by the Bolsheviks bridged the social cleavages that fueled the native Basmachi resistance and alienated the native population. This approach continued to be discussed and tested within the Red DIME construct. For instance, the efforts to put a native face in government and integrate natives into all facets of the Red DIME apparatus proved to be a profound development in Turkistan. This is also a lesson that has parallels to initial US miscalculations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As additional illustrative examples will demonstrate, 21<sup>st</sup> Century DIME tenants are discernible throughout the Bolshevik engagement against the Basmachi Resistance. The D in Red DIME played a significant role in shaping and informing the Soviet national and provincial decision-making process as authorities made inroads to secure, sustain, and develop across towns and villages of the Ferghana Valley.

## **Information**

Bolshevik information operations during 1918-1920 did not resonate, as they rarely took into consideration societal mores or basic norms in Turkistani culture. Tone-deaf partisans thrust into authoritative Bolshevik positions showed themselves to be either unwilling or unable to recognize the tell tale signs of discontent openly building throughout the Ferghana Valley. Thus,

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<sup>11</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 139, sheet 39.

information operations, in combination with psychological and information operations, became a medium on which the reframed Red Dime effort would come to rely heavily upon.

The ability of Soviet authorities to take stock of past performance while identifying areas and nuances that needed correction proved to be a pivotal aspect of the momentum shift that occurred during the 1921-1923 time period. The following account of the Revolutionary Committee, dated June 1921, shows that Soviet authorities were able to identify critical shortcomings, and where feasible, correct them by infusing flexibility within previously unbending Soviet dogma:

Agenda: Comrade Gumerov discusses success on the Basmachi Battle front

The struggle against the Basmachi has three distinct periods. The first period is the formation of the Basmachi during Tsarist rule prior to the October Revolution. Tensions escalated following the Kokand Autonomous Governments brief attempt to fill the power vacuum, during which time they employed a policy against workers and farmers. The slogan used [to gain popular support] by the Basmachi in those days highlighted the struggle for Islam and against continued infidel rule. Such slogans found success due to the fact that the population was unaware of the Soviet aims and goals. That coupled with tactical errors by the local Soviet authorities helped to build up an even greater distance between the Government and the population.

During the second period, Kurbashi Mytindin-bek had the ability to organize a band of up to 10,000 Basmachi. The struggle with the Red Army and the Basmachi was exceedingly difficult, as Military detachments and Soviet authorities entered villages without knowing traditions or psychological aspects of the population. This meant that we did gain traction with the population. The Bolsheviks compensated for this gap only at the end of 1921, using the struggle against the Basmachi as an opportunity to develop a different paradigm, which evolved into the third period. The New Economic Program (NEP)<sup>12</sup> was a major breakthrough that helped us bridge the divides. Also, the organization of Militias drawn from the local population picked up pace. Such revised methods against the Basmachi demonstrated good results. And now we are on the cusp of the liquidation of the armed Basmachi. In order to terminate the Basmachi completely, we must focus on developing agriculture. Furthermore, it is [the Bolshevik authorities] obligation to take all the necessary steps to rebuild the ruined economy and to explain this major goal to the native population.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The New Economic Plan instituted by the Soviets between 1921-1928, which represented a temporary retreat from previous policy of extreme centralization and rigid socialism.

<sup>13</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 133, sheet 80.

It is apparent that a commanding amount of power emanated from the Ferghana Revolutionary Committee, and the Committee kept a close watch on the performance of the regional Revolutionary committees, including but not limited to main centers in the regions such as Andijan, Marghilon, Namangan, and Osh. As Namangan remained a stain on the relatively successful Ferghana Valley Basmachi liquidation effort in the summer of 1922, the following reply to the Ferghana Regional Revolutionary committee contains detailed information concerning operations. What is significant is the frank discussion of problems plaguing Namangan, and a hint of the exasperation that comes across in the tone of the response. The exasperation apparently stemmed from being unable to mirror the considerable progress in other regions of the Ferghana Valley in early-to-mid 1922, and the uncontested sway that the Kurbashi Rahmankul continued to wield throughout Namangan region. Archival minutes from a meeting of the Namangan City Regional Executive Committee of the Labor Union and Red Army Deputies dated 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1922 addresses concerns that the powerful Ferghana Regional Revolutionary Committee raised about the Basmachi situation in Namangan:

In response to request No2761, dated June 22, that we received on June 28, the following Revolutionary Committee report covers Jan 1<sup>st</sup> till July 1<sup>st</sup> of 1922

1) During this time period the Basmachi killed 17 Militia. We cannot give exact numbers regarding the amount of civilians murdered by them [Basmachi], because we lost communication for extended periods with the outlying regions due directly to intense Basmachi activity. As far as we know, they have killed a great amount of people.

2) Total Military Desertions: Since March, five men from Namangan City District One deserted to join the Basmachi, taking with them five rifles and a total of 80 bullets. From the Second District of the city, three men joined Basmachi while taking fourteen Mosin-Nagant 1891 model rifles and 25 bullets as well as seven Russian Remington Rollingblock rifles with a total of 85 bullets. From Nanisk region, one person joined Basmachi with Berdan rifles and thirty bullets. Two people left from the Calvary, taking eight Mosin-Nagant rifles and 137 bullets. From the Ashtsk region two men deserted and they took a total of two hundred bullets. And from Chust, two people deserted taking away two Mosin-Nagant rifles and 225 bullets, along with 50 bullets for Berdan rifles. The total amount of Militia that deserted and joined the Basmachi is fifteen, taking away a mix of 21 rifles with them. We have no data whatsoever on the number of civilians that joined the Basmachi.

- 3) We have not come across any cases of mass desertion to Basmachi.
- 4) The Basmachi did not capture our Militia or Soviet Employees, but they did capture civilians. We do not know have an accurate count of how many civilians have been captured by the Basmachi. As we mentioned above, seventeen Militia were killed in skirmishes with the Basmachi, during which we lost three Berdan rifles with 120 bullets, eleven Mosin-Nagant rifles with 573 bullets, two Vitreli rifles with 100 bullets, and three Lebel Gras rifles with 30 bullets.
- 5) We do not have an exact number of villages robbed by the Basmachi, as they are robbing each village they encounter, as this is their main source of survival.
- 6) We cannot accurately measure the percentage of the population that suffers from Basmachi, but we know it is great.
- 7) Industries [factories and plants] as well as Soviet organs have not been affected by the Basmachi, as they are all concentrated in the cities of Namangan and Chust.
- 8) On a positive note, 117 soldiers of Basmachi joined the Soviets side, bringing 27 revolvers of different types with 62 bullets, three hunting rifles, 23 additional mixed rifles with 249 bullets, five cavalry swords, and six knives.
- 9) The amount of minor Kurbashi that joined the Soviets during this time is a total of three.
- 10) The total amount of weapons that Basmachi brought back with them is stated in the previous passages.
- 11) In the battles against the Basmachi, we have captured the following numbers of rifles: nine Mosin-Nagant rifles with 323 bullets, seventeen Berdan with 505 bullets, ten different revolvers with 25 bullets, one German Mauzer, one Vitreli rifle with 100 bullets and one Japanese Arisaka rifle with 24 bullets, and twenty eight bullets meant to be used with Lebel Gras rifles.

At the current time the Basmachi are situated in Ashtak region in the mountains bordering the Tashkent region. They are near Naiman-Polvan, which is in Nanysk region, and in Kizil Pavate in the area close to the mountains. The Basmachi have direct communication with the Kurbashi Rahmankul, who is currently in the Ashtask region. Yakubai is located in Sara Kumish, which is in Kazansk region. Chatkal is occupied by a minor Kyrgyz Kurbashi, and Dadabei Kurbashi is along the river Daria, near Tura Kurgan.

The relatively insignificant Basmachi bands that do not have any firm relationship with each other support themselves by robbing the population. If they encounter any Military detachments, they immediately relocate to the Andijan region or to the mountains without engaging. It seems like the Basmachi bands are in a state of deterioration. We believe that in the nearest future we will be able to liquidate the Basmachi. Of the 29 regions in Namangan, seven remain primarily in the Basmachi phase. The neighboring region of Pashkapransk is experiencing constant attacks from the Basmachi.

The total amount of Militia in the region is 414 Infantry, 314 Cavalry, 32 KOMSOSTAV (Staff of Commanders), 52 clerks, 182 Border Guards excluding the nomad areas, where the Kiroff Detachment operates with 350 Rifles, as the militia have trouble maneuvering in that region.

This Data is received from the Militia and Secret Police. The Military Headquarters hasn't provided us with any information thus far.<sup>14</sup>

The fiercely waged Soviet propaganda campaign in the Ferghana Valley, focused on winning the trust of the population, proved to be a key linchpin of the Red DIME effort to neutralize and to eventually entirely negate native support for the Basmachi. By 1921, initial modifications to the overly ambitious Soviet agenda for the region circulated throughout the Ferghana Valley, and assisted Bolshevik authorities in making initial inroads in terms of efforts to reconcile with the native population. "Aware that early attempts at antireligious agitation had proved clumsy and counterproductive, the Soviets elected to proceed patiently and curtail frontal attacks on Islamic Institutions. The revised approach emphasized economic development and secular public education to promote the training of native cadres. Native religious institutions, such as courts and schools, would for a time continue to function."<sup>15</sup>

The Bolsheviks came to realize that the only way to make inroads was to temper their approach, especially concerning religion in Ferghana Valley society. Not only were the Kurbashi leaders well aware of these efforts, but they also recognized the destabilizing effect that this bold effort would have on their vital network of local supporters who were growing increasingly tired of continuous hardship and unrest. Thus, under the signature of local Kurbashi, strenuous Basmachi efforts tried to counter the propaganda and influence local opinion. One such effort

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan*, 103.

took place in the Osh region, and was dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 1921. The text on the notice that was anonymously posted throughout the city:

“To all the workers and inhabitants of Osh city”:

I, who write this notice, the Commander of Muslim Army Said-Ahmat Panhsat, inform you that we have a lot of cattle, sheep, grain, clothing and such. Whether you have a job or not, have weapons or not, we invite you to join us to serve for the Muslim faith and to turn away from the Bolsheviks. I will appoint those who join us according to their merit and character and will provide recruits with necessary supplies. Understand, we refrain from killing, even if the person is of Russian descent, and our commanding officers also have issued orders to refrain from killing.

Stamp of Said-Ahmed Pangsat<sup>16</sup>

Another notice was posted in Namangan region, and while addressed to the Soviet Commander of the district, was undoubtedly aimed at simultaneously generating public support and sympathy for the Basmachi efforts while stoking resentment and outrage at the alleged Soviet actions. The Bolshevik partisans in positions of authority had sullied their reputations with the natives in the early stages of the conflict, as they oversaw implementation of contentious policy and supervised undisciplined Bolshevik Military actions in the Ferghana Valley region. The revamped Red DIME strategy and tactics clearly emphasized the need to curb marauders within the Red Army and stressed the removal of those individuals or detachments that besmirched the legitimate Bolshevik efforts. The Basmachi were eager to stress to the native population that the Soviets were being met and defeated in battle and simultaneously underscored the nefarious nature of the Soviet forces:

DEPUTY of COMMANDER GENERAL SHIRMAT KURBASHI  
TO TASHLAK COMMANDER OF SOVIETS AND TROOPS

#### NOTICE

I inform the Russian Bolsheviks that today, ten of your troop's raided Garbaba village, taking horses and plundering houses. My troops caught up with this group, and killed eight of their people, and the remaining two were captured. I released these two men

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<sup>16</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 63, sheet 92.

alive. If any of your troops will be captured, I will release them after taking their weapons.

## NOTICE 2

To all Bolsheviks, you steal horses from the population and plunder their houses. Do you do it with a goal to goad us into a fight? If so, take counsel with your committees, appoint a place for a fight, and let me know so we can meet you. [Plundering the defenseless population] is the wrong way to fight. Let me know your decision, and if you won't provide Muslims with their rights, then we will be fighting to the last man and you will meet your fate. I am asking you in good will to give us our rights and avoid war. Provide an answer immediately.

Stamp of Commander General of Ferghana Region Troops  
SHIRMAT KURBASH HOD KUSI KUSHAKBAEV<sup>17</sup>

The third piece of Basmachi propaganda offers a unique view into the mindset that afflicted the Basmachi at this time period. The Kurbashi leader cited below displayed a keen recognition of the fluctuating nature of Basmachi popular support. What is important is that the Soviet authorities also took heed, and made a concerted effort to translate verbatim the postings in order to better understand what they faced and appropriately combat the Basmachi counter propaganda messages:

A translation of the Announcement from the Commander of the Muslim Army of Rahmankul Gazi

From Commander of Muslim Army Rahmankul Gazi

My dear Muslims, do you understand that the Soviet Bolsheviks want to fool you with the propaganda they write and post on the walls? These notices claim to be on behalf of literate occupants of city of Tashkent. These shameless Bolsheviks called us Basmachi, and they do not believe in God. If someone does believe they are laughed at and a record is made about them in Bolshevik books. For the past five years they have failed to achieve anything good, only brought destruction to our country, and now they are writing in their notices that they want to restore the Islamic faith. Oh, you shameless Bolsheviks, if you now accept the faith, why did you record the believers in God, saints and angels, in your books, and fool Muslim and Russian boys by allowing them to study in the same school together with girls, where they become pregnant and give births to babies, and you

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

also permit husband and wife to divorce. These misjudgments of yours are well known by all the people holding sincere values. So, now are you not ashamed, are not your faces red from the shame that now you claim to accept the faith? No, your lying makes you unwise, nobody believes your lies, nobody is afraid of you, because they have the Koran in their hands, and it won't lie to them.

The stamp of the Leader of the Muslim ARMY of Rakmankul.<sup>18</sup>

Another aspect of the Information operation was the Soviet ability to collect solid intelligence on Basmachi and their Kurbashi leaders. Soviet authorities in the Ferghana Valley went to great lengths to make painstakingly accurate lists of Kurbashi and Basmachi in each village and town. Understanding that details were critical, they included the names, position in the band, type of weapon, and amount of ammunition. One such list, dated the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1922, focused on details concerning 18 Basmachi in Sutlan-abad Rayon.<sup>19</sup> These Bolshevik efforts have direct parallels to 21<sup>st</sup> century human terrain team efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as their goal focused on better understanding the operating environment and keeping track of the linkages and the major and minor players throughout the region.

An additional aspect of the information collection operation focused on the leaders of the Basmachi bands, the Kurbashi. One report goes into great detail about Kurbashi Islam-kul, including his background, leadership abilities, health status, and recent path to power. The level of detail is evident as the report also points to Islam-kul's debilitating syphilis ailment as being a limiting condition that impedes his desire to bind the various Basmachi bands operating in the Ferghana Valley under his banner.<sup>20</sup>

Understanding the Basmachi became a central facet of the revamped Bolshevik approach. Additional emphasis on meticulous record keeping proved to be a key element in the Red Dime effort. For example, records show that in the Namangan region where Kurbashi Rahmankul held

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<sup>18</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 23.

<sup>20</sup> B.B. Kalmonov, *Short History of the Islam-Kul Band*, (1923) 2-3.



considerable sway, the Basmachi had gained momentum in 1920 and 1921 and reached a crescendo in the summer and fall of 1922. Thus, in an effort to reestablish credibility and gain traction with the local population, the Soviet authorities put additional emphasis on the natives within local Revolutionary Committees throughout the Namangan region. Soviet officials collated this information into a dossier and incorporated as much real-time relevant information about the local Revolutionary committee members as possible.

Simultaneously, recognizing local colleagues that purported to be friends of the Soviets was important, as seen clearly through the Namangan Regional compilation of Revolutionary Committee data, including well over 450 locals that were active on the rayon and village soviets. The minutia of detail on the list is impressive, and provides background information on each individual, including position on the respective committee, occupation, age, nationality, education level reached, level of literacy, party affiliation and in which district they resided. What is notable is that with few exceptions, the vast majority of the individuals were either characterized Uzbek or Kyrgyz, with only a sprinkling of Russians. This meshed well with renewed Bolshevik effort to put a local face on the Soviet efforts at the grassroots level. Switching sides was not an uncommon phenomenon in districts where Kurbashi sway ebbed and flowed. Such an intensive database undoubtedly assisted the local authorities in keeping tabs on individuals, and allaying lingering paranoia about where loyalties rested.

Additionally, identifying the movement of weapons to re-supply Basmachi was crucial to the success of the Soviet authorities. Contacts within the local population, especially aggressive cultivation of relationships with former members of the Basmachi, played a key role in disrupting and eventually bringing the Basmachi supply system to a standstill. One such example discusses the clever use of camels to deliver arms to the Ferghana Valley leader, Kurbashi Rahmankul. An interesting aside is that the informant offers evidence against a Comrade Kasimhanov that works with the Secret Police (Cheka) in Ferghana. Whether it was an attempt to settle an old score or not, the impact of this allegation on Comrade Kasimhanov is unknown:

### Information about Kurbashi Rahmankulov in Ashabinsk region

This information is given to us by a former Basmachi in the band of the Kurbashi, Rahmankul. This informer, Mahmed Ali, joined the Soviets and is a resident of the village Uighur. He passed along the following information:

The number of men in the Rahkmankul Band is 400. 300 are armed with Mosin-Nagant rifles, and 100 are armed with Russian Remington Rollingblock rifles. Abdula-jon Ziyev and an old man whose name is Abihodjiev deliver rifles and bullets from Tashkent. Incidentally, Abidhodjiev accidentally shot himself in the leg with a revolver. He lives in Tashkent in the district of Kashgar Mahalla and is a former teacher. The rifles are shipped in the saddles of camels without their stocks. In addition, Abidhodjiev has a relationship with a member of the Ferghana Regional Cheka (Secret Police, or FerObCHEKA), Tovarish Kasimhanov. This data was provided to Abidhodjiev by Kasimhonov himself.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the Bolshevik authorities became well versed in information collection and distribution, learning to craft messages through the cultural prism while simultaneously making it worthwhile for natives to contribute to the information gathering process. Better understanding the effects of Bolshevik actions, especially as perceived by the native population, allowed the authorities to learn from early shortcomings and incorporate effective propaganda to challenge the Basmachi for native support. As the Basmachi propaganda demonstrates, off the battlefield this turned into a spirited effort to win hearts and minds wielding the information.

## Military

Continuous references throughout the archives stress that the Red Military did not initially have the unconventional capacity necessary to parry the blows deftly delivered by the Basmachi resistance movement. The Bolshevik guerrilla efforts often did much more harm than good for the overarching Soviet cause. Provincial level Bolshevik guerrilla detachments pillaged and plundered more often than not, wreaking havoc and spreading instability. Below is a transcript of the May 22 meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkistan.

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<sup>21</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 143, sheet 1.

It highlights pivotal issues that needed to be rectified in order to succeed. Especially telling is the stress placed on the ability of the Military institution to understand local languages and culture, while simultaneously putting a premium on interagency collaboration and cohesion:

We must pay special attention to increase support and strengthen the Red Army, as it plays a vital role in bringing freedom to the working people of the enslaved East. Yet we have to admit that due to lack of soldiers in the Soviet Army that are familiar with the local traditions and lifestyles, which differ significantly from Russian traditions and norms, we often face unwanted friction between local population and divisions of the Red Army. Therefore we must immediately mobilize a sufficient number of qualified soldiers that understand local cultural and languages traits and integrate them into the Army. Also, we have to take all necessary precautions to eliminate any arguments occurring between the military authorities and civil organs as well as those of the Red Army and Militia by organizing general meetings, negotiations, discussions, etc....

In addition, the emphasis on unity of the various organs of power is critical, as it is clear that territorial issues had impeded unified progress. Without the ability to work toward a common goal, the liquidation of the Basmachi will be unfeasible.

To make it clear once again that all the organs of punishment (courts/militia/etc) and Russian Soviet Federation of the Soviet Republics along with the GPU (General Party) of the Turkistani Republic are working under the full political management of the Turkistani Bureau of the Central Committee of the Republican Communistic Party and in close contact with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkistan.

Every day of work the Party must stress the need to strengthen the internal unity of the party along with worker discipline. We must do this by bringing Marxist Education to the members of the party as well as to strengthen the professional Unions and the working farmers of the “KOSHCHI” Union. At this period, when the Soviet Regime has to give up a lot [tempered Marxist zeal and agenda to defeat Basmachi] in Turkistan, it is very important to lead the ultimate struggle against the counter-revolutionary parties of ‘separatists and Mensheviks’.<sup>22</sup>

In a section of a 1922 archival document entitled “A plan for military pressure”, blunt discussion focused on the acute shortcomings of the previous military policy in the Ferghana Valley, most notably the lawlessness by the very Red Army soldiers that were tasked with tracking down the Basmachi and restoring order. The follow passage offers unique insights, in that authorities not only recognized the deficiencies, but also had the courage to break from a

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<sup>22</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 196-197.

flawed approach. Bolshevik leaders with experience downrange introduced cutting edge policy and tactics to shape the environment in their favor, thereby producing a definite shift in the battle against the Basmachi:

We used to have four military detachments of Basmachi liquidators, which were acting mostly as partisans [chasing the most important or largest Kurbashi and their bands] without consideration to the warfronts, administrative borders, etc...The Five organizations [Pyietrka], in their last trip around the area, considered the activities of the partisans totally inappropriate. The [Kurbashi] Kazakbei, having good horses, are attacking all over the region, while our detachments in their current cumbersome form cannot possibly give chase to the myriad attacks.

Therefore, we placed two Soviet Military detachments of Basmachi liquidators apiece in each of the four war fronts: Harabensk, Kokand Village, Hakulabadsk, and a city one in Mir-abad, etc...These detachments of liquidators consist of two units of reconnaissance/intelligence parties on horseback from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> regiment and six detachments of Militia from Hakulabadsk, Karasuusk, Djalabadsk, and Bazarkorgansk and the Andijan City Militia. These battlefronts have direct lines with the regional center, which now coordinates the war against the Basmachi. Every hour, through the network of special agents that are working in these territories and in the garrisons, we have an opportunity to determine exact locations of the enemy, and we can control the activities of the detachments of liquidators and direct them to follow in the same direction as the enemy. Therefore, our troops, acting in coordination within set territories, do not allow a single chance for the Basmachi bands to stop for rest, as they would become surrounded. And if the enemy troops decide to cross into another administrative territory, then in this case they will always confront another Military detachment of ours that has fresh horses and soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

This policy would eventually evolve into the “flying detachments” approach that combined enhancing communication lines along with infusing the concept of mobility into the equation.<sup>24</sup>

The above archival document goes on to highlight the positive ramification of the reframed strategy, and how the techniques employed enhanced the robustness of military capabilities when engaging the Basmachi:

We already have positive results of this strategy. Until now we almost never had even a single battle against Kazakbei, due to the reasons detailed above. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan*, 101.

we had a battle in the Madressa (religious school), where Kazakbai was surrounded by three detachments of liquidators. As a result, we captured four Vitreli rifles and four horses were killed. Also, three Basmachi were liquidated, and the personal assistant of Kazakbei, Yulibai, was wounded. We also captured Kurbashi Kazakbei's revolver and his personal seal/stamp.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, we had a fight in the village of Lugenbek, where we killed 11 Basmachi, and we took some trophies that were later identified. Although the results are not as great as they could be, it is because the terrain is quite difficult for the conduct of military operations. These results certainly still show that we have chosen the right techniques when compared with the previous ones.<sup>25</sup>

Additional successes appeared as the Bolshevik tactics evolved against the Basmachi resistance, such as the use of armored trains and increased protection for the vital rail lines that had been subject to countless attacks by Basmachi.

However, prior to these successes, the Bolshevik authorities' initial inability to supervise the actions of their Military Detachments in more remote regions of the Ferghana Valley continued to vex them. The lasting negative ramifications, where the natives experienced Soviet power in the form of an undisciplined Military Division such as the one that operated in Ketmin-Turbinsk region of Namangan, made addressing this issue a top priority. The follow passage describes how Bolshevik authorities scrambled to make amends when the Regional Soviet Special Commission identified an issue that was markedly disrupting the establishment of trust with the local population due to actions of a susceptible Military Detachment:

In regards to the Ketmin-Tyrbinsk region, the Chairman of the Commission, Comrade Makaev, went to the region to do estimates and see how things looked on the ground. This included an inspection of the Soviet Detachment. The commander of the Soviet Detachment was the son of Kerimbya [a rich native]. It became clear to Comrade Makaev that due to these connections, the Kerimbya engaged in a variety of criminal activities. In fact, the entire region of Ketmin-Tybi is ruled by this rich man, the local Uzbek, and with the help of his son, he had a Soviet detachment at his disposal. The detachment proceeded to abuse the local population, stealing cattle and supplies. The local authorities were helpless.

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<sup>25</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 196-197.

After Kerimbya was arrested, local authorities released him due to the influence of another regional Military detachment Commander, Comrade Usmanbekov. Comrade Usmanbekov requested his release and acted as a guarantor. When he was released, the Kerembi returned home and started to repress the local population that had informed the Soviet authorities of his abuses.

In order to correct this mistake, the Special Commission completely changed the distribution of power in the region by replacing all major authorities. They kicked out Kerembya and others for impeding progress in the region. Regaining the trust of the population is especially critical as this region is the most important cattle breeding area in the Ferghana Valley and is the major cattle supply from Semirechi to Ferghana.<sup>26</sup>

To be certain, momentum ebbed and flowed throughout more difficult regions of the Ferghana Valley, and even surged back into the centers of power, such as the seat of Government in the region, Ferghana city. As late as mid-1922, an insightful Revolutionary Committee report from Ferghana City focused on the organization of the civil defense in the city of Ferghana due to surprisingly aggressive attacks by area Basmachi. Authorities discussed increased focus on civil defense, especially due to attacks and banditry by Basmachi and separate criminal groups. The recommendations are as follows:

To suggest the Vice Secretary of the City Committee of Communist Party, Comrade Ivlev, and Secretaries of the Legislative Bureau, Comrades' Ipatov and Shemsudiov, create from list of all party members and members of the professional unions that are active on the territory of Ferghana City and that could assist in defense of the town. These lists should state the exact address of the members. We recommend that every single member must be introduced to the major points of the citadel defense for the city. After receiving instruction, every single member has to sign a statement that they understood the directions and are willing to assist.

Also, we would like to request that the Regional Military Commissar, Comrade Timoninu, and the Commandants of the City craft detailed instructions on the subject of civil defense. Upon receiving these instructions, along with the lists of party members, the Revolutionary Committee will make sure that Regional Authorities designate units for regional defense. Furthermore, we will contact the local garrison and ask about the possibility of providing enough weapons and military munitions to be able to sufficiently organize civil defense. All work must be performed under the supervision of the Uzbek Military Committee (Uzboenkomata).

All the direction stated above regarding the technical preparation for civil defense must be completed within the next five days. In addition, the Committee asks the head of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

garrison and head of the city defense to continue the defending the city with all means possible, and continue right up to the point when Civil defense is up and running. Also, they must increase patrols in the city until further notice.<sup>27</sup>

The Basmachi ability to counter momentum sporadically at the provincial level was made evident in the surprise attacks that peppered not only the countryside, but also the city centers. As 1921 and 1922 wore on, the Basmachi bands were fighting for their very existence, and continued to exploit one of their few remaining advantages of essentially fighting in their backyard. This brief account of a recent skirmish with the Kurbashi Rahmankul and his band is particularly candid. On a positive note for the Soviet authorities, this points to an increased flow of fresh information that served to keep relevant provincial level Soviet organs abreast of setbacks, such as this one in the Namangan region:

Operational Information current as of 12 pm on 16 of August 1922

Namangan Region: 11 Aug, 1922, during the battle that lasted from 0800 until 2100 in the area of Ashava village in Chust district, the band of Kurbashi Rahmankul, which was composed of about 1000 people, killed 11 Militia, leaving one missing. The Basmachi captured 11 of our rifles, 800 bullets, 17 horses, two bombs, and one grenade. They also occupied the headquarters of the Military Detachment along with the entire village of Ashava.<sup>28</sup>

An evolution of the policy that dealt with enemy combatants who laid down their arms took place during these years. Initial attempts to bring Basmachi decisively over to the Soviet side had failed, as the Basmachi bands would game the system by feigning switching sides and enjoying Bolshevik largess until an opportunity presented itself to defect. Bolshevik authorities wised up and began to adapt a more practical strategy. One facet of the reconstituted strategy included the use of Amnesty, as seen in this illustrative archival example from 1921:

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<sup>27</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 140, sheet 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 164.

On Bazaar [Market Day] in Osh City, a very large meeting took place in the area where the natives' reside. The Representatives of the Department of the Political Bureau, the Representatives of the Special Department and Revolutionary Committee, City Committee, and Military Representatives organized the meeting. About eight to nine thousand locals participated. The main event was the presentation of 27 Basmachi at the meeting. They were Basmachi applying for Amnesty.

The [Soviet Officials] explained to the locals the conditions for Amnesty. Each individual gave a pledge to live an honest life and comply with all the rules and regulations of the Soviet Regime. After that the Basmachi were freed. Following the release of the Basmachi, the Soviet Representatives from the organs named above gave speeches concerning the ills associated with the Basmachi and talked about the progress and positive developments in the region.<sup>29</sup>

The early trickle of sincere Amnesty applicants would eventually lead to an intense effort to reintegrate a steady stream of former Basmachi fighters. This integrated well with the overall Basmachi liquidation strategy. The strategy is discussed in detail in the following archival documentation, dated 2 December, 1923:

The summer campaign of 1923 in Ferghana region ended with the destruction of the strongest Basmachi bands. These successful actions reinstalled peaceful life and full order throughout the territory of the region. With the exception of one part of Marghelan county, [note:"yezd" – an administrative unit of an "oblast" which I translated as a "region"], this provides for the possibility of a smooth transition from exceptionally severe measures employed in fight against the Basmach movement to an evolved method of struggle.

The liquidation of the Basmachi movement was a result of intense Military pressure along with a range of other actions directed towards the Economic recovery of Ferghana. These combined actions certainly persuaded the population to side with the Soviet government, as the conditions fostered a strong belief in the natives' ability to work and achieve a peaceful existence. Simultaneously, it created the conditions for backlash of population against the Basmachi movement. The political situation in Ferghana is estimated as such that the regeneration of Basmachi movement in the region is now not possible. We predict the remaining Basmachi forces will undoubtedly melt away during the course of this winter.

According to a decree of the Turkistan Central Executionary Committee, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, all the Kurbashi who voluntarily surrendered with their weapons during 1923 will be released. They shall be allowed to start a peaceful life immediately after the release. All released Kurbashi are issued documents [udostovernie-a form of state Identification Card] with the stamp of the Turkistan Central Executionary Committee [TurZIK] along with the signature of the Chairman of TurCEC [note:TurZIK] and a

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<sup>29</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archives, Fund 435, index me, item 141, sheet 4.



member of Revolutionary Military Committee of USSR Comrad Haidaraliev. These documents provide them [Kurbashi] with the rights of citizens of the Soviet Republic.

The only Basmachi who remained in custody are the ones captured with the Kurbachi Kazak-Bai, and they will be prosecuted. Additional captured leaders of Basmachi movement that are slated to be prosecuted are as follows: Islamkul, Ahmat-Palvan, Bajastan, Junus, Sultan, and Palich Saki.

Furthermore, for continued success against Basmachi movement, the following strategy must be reinforced throughout the Ferghana region:

Continued success will be had by maintaining a steady increase in military pressure against the remaining groups of the Basmachi movement. These are lead by Jarmat Maksum, Turdy-Bai, Jusup-Djan-Maksum, Karabai, and Umarali. With the exception of wanted Kurbashi such as Julchi, Mulla-Sabir, Ishmat-Beshmach Mirza-Umar, Usta-Djur Butabek, and Buril-Bai, all other Kurbashi that voluntarily surrender should be released through the organs of the Special [Osobyi otdel] Department with an issuance to them of TurZIK Identification; Red Army and police should not negotiate with the active Kurbashi.

The office of the Special Department will continue to use military pressure as their core strategy. They should also increase their efforts to debilitate Basmachi bands through persuasion, focusing on gaining the surrender of single members of the bands. Make sure that all those who voluntarily surrendered do so with their weapons. Basmachi, excluding those listed above, should be immediately released with an issuance to them of TurZIK identification.

Commanding officers and Commanding structures in the field, in conjunction with respective Ispolkoms [Executionary Committees], are responsible for the reintegration of released Kurbashi, as they may be economically in need, despite their past roles in the Basmachi movement. To have them settle economically with the assurance of a peaceful life is of utmost importance, as this would exclude a possibility of their return to Basmachi movement. Also, the Red Army must strive to constantly deepen the brotherly relationship with local population. The Red Army must firmly remember that only this unbreakable union will protect Ferghana from the disruption of order and discourage the Basmachi movement.

The Red Army and Red Militia will fulfill their obligation to the working people of Ferghana in 1923 and will meet the goals set here, with the resolution to ultimately provide a peaceful working life to all of Ferghana. The reestablishment of Ferghana Valley land with cotton will contribute to the increased might of the Soviet Union as a whole. All decisions and orders made by commanding structures and Special department in regards to implementation of this plan must be urgently reported to Revolutionary Military Committee of Turkistan Front.

Signed:

Temporary Commander of Turkestan Front:      Todorski

Member of RevMilCom USSR Hidyraliev<sup>30</sup>

Military officers with two to three years experience in Ferghana Valley Red DIME policy and tactics were extremely prized, and rightfully recognized as having the skills needed to finish off the Basmachi liquidation effort. Soviet authorities in the Ferghana Valley remained reluctant to acquiesce when an outstanding Commander was being recalled, even if it meant postponing his acceptance of additional Military study. The follow telegram, marked SECRET, captures the essence of the argument as it convincingly outlines the Commander's qualities that are clearly suited for the non-conventional Basmachi engagement. The letter also stresses the Commander's outstanding ability to grasp the issues at hand, and lauds his keen sense of how to implement the revamped effort of winning over the native population. The letter opens:

The Ferghana Region Revolutionary Committee and the Ferghana Region Committee of Communist Party of Turkistan have been notified that in September, Military Commander and member of Revolutionary Military Committee Comrade TODORSKI will be recalled for a study on advanced military courses. During Comrade TODORSKI's time in the Ferghana Valley, his ingenuity, energy, initiative, masterful management of his troops, and very close, friendly connection with the local workers and native population have played an enormous role in final liquidation of a Basmachi movement. Therefore, we find that timing of this study is exceptionally unfortunate and request that Comrade TODORSKI not yet be recalled.

The Basmachi movement is living in its last days, requiring only one or two more strikes to be finished. A change of commander, without any doubt, will have a profoundly negative effect on the overall strategy implementation and completion of military operations.

Take into account that Comrade TODORSKI, during his short service time in Ferghana Region, has better assessed and adjusted to the local situation and has chosen a right path to achieve a connection between the Red Army and the native population than any of his predecessors. We strongly encourage you to delay a recall of Comrade TODORSKI until a complete liquidation of Basmachi movement. A careful study of this situation will show that the work conducted by Comrade TODORSKI is much more important at this time than military study.

We hope to receive a positive response in the very near future.

Secretary of Regional Committee of Communist Party of Turkistan      Segizbaev

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<sup>30</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, item 145, sheet 91.

Chairman of Ferghana Regional Revolutionary Committee and  
Member of Regional RevMilCom  
Secretary of Regional Revolutionary Committee

Ali-Hodzhaev  
Nikiforov

Another under-explored facet of military power in the Ferghana Valley campaign was the use of Airpower by the Soviet Authorities in the Ferghana Valley. “Though not central elements in the anti-Basmachi campaigns, aerial and naval assets played a significant supporting role. Red Army airplanes preformed an invaluable service in a reconnaissance role and, occasionally, in combat. Although strafing and bombings seldom resulted in great physical harm to the enemy, their psychological efforts were incredible.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Basmachi were certainly terrified of the new weapon, and reportedly referred to them in great fear as ‘Satan’s Wagon’.<sup>32</sup> But the lack of knowledge regarding the scale of the employment of Red Army airplanes warrants further examination. Very few if any works on the Soviet effort have provided details, locations, or the number and type of aircraft used against the Basmachi. Archival documents point to the increased relevance of airpower against the Basmachi in 1921, including the first ever nighttime bombing run in Central Asia.<sup>33</sup> According to memoirs, the pilot surprised the Basmachi and their families cooking an evening plov (traditional Uzbek dinner) out in their yard, and subsequently engaged in a thorough strafing run. This is only one of a handful of very colorful descriptions of incidents that occurred as airpower tactics were improvised and tested. The employment of Airpower in the Ferghana Valley region during 1921-1923, provided another tool to shape the environment using the Red DIME construct.

Research for this monograph indicates the assets available to the Red Army in the Ferghana Valley were actually quite extensive for the time. The Aerodrome in Ferghana

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan*, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Fedor Ivanovich Zharova, *Autobiography, Lieutenant-General of Red Army Aviation in the Reserves*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

(formerly Skobelev), housed a total of 18 airplanes. The assets in the service of the Ferghana theatre: two French Nieuports, three British Sopwith Camels, two French Farman-30, and one French Voisin-3. The Pilots included: A.V. Morozov, S.N. Nikitin, I.I.Cherni, P.M. Peregonov, M.M. Ivanov, H.V. Fausek, along with unidentified others.<sup>34</sup>

## Economic

The Economic facet was a critical component of the revamped Red DIME construct, especially in light of shortages of basics and severe famine crippling wide expanses of the Ferghana Valley region during this period. Thus, in the midst of reforming Soviet Economic policy in the region, including the introduction of the New Economic Program<sup>35</sup> in 1921, local Soviet authorities were also attempting to mitigate the effects of a humanitarian catastrophe. To win support from the population and combat the Basmachi, the Bolsheviks set forth to rectify overly stringent economic policy, thereby alleviating the suffering of natives that stemmed from strict enforcement of early Marxist economic policy. Collectivization efforts and land redistribution moved to the backburner of the Bolshevik agenda as jumpstarting the economy called for unbinding the economy and decreasing repression of rich landholders, as they were integral to short-term economic efforts, and would be dealt with down the road. “Economic conditions were of no small significance, and Lenin’s New Economic Policy brought much-needed relief from state requisitions of agricultural goods and draconian restrictions on the conduct of commerce.”<sup>36</sup> In the Ferghana Valley, traditionally one of the most fertile regions of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>35</sup> The New Economic Program was the Economic Policy of the Soviet Government from 1921-1928, representing a temporary retreat from its previous policy of extreme centralization and strict socialism. The policy of War Communism, in effect since 1918, had brought the national economy on the brink of complete ruin.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Bauman, Ibid., 104.

Turkistan, agriculture and commerce were the lifeblood that sustained the inhabitants of the area. Thus, to get the region back on its feet and prime the economy, local Soviet authorities began to introduce various forms of assistance and tax relief. They also focused on increasing productivity by repairing and improving the severely neglected irrigation system throughout the Ferghana Valley. This helped put locals back to work during the exceptionally lean times, and had a dual purpose of offering employment and providing an avenue for a breadwinner to feed his family. Simultaneously, this effort assisted the pivotal agriculture rehabilitation agenda, including the renewed emphasis on valuable, yet water-hungry cotton.

Also, the reconfiguration of the ill functioning tax system into one palatable to the native inhabitants remained critical to the Soviet authorities in the Ferghana Valley and the region. The natives continued to chafe at what they perceived to be an overbearing tax burden, especially during the famine when crops harvested were meager and livestock suffered mightily. The Basmachi seized the initiative during the initial years of Soviet rule, and stoked the native discontent. The local Soviet authorities found themselves in a bind, as the young Soviet regime required a consistent infusion of funds, and relied on various forms of local populace taxation in order to subsist during the turbulent times.

While a taxation system existed under the tsarist regime, the system had collapsed along with the Tsarist institutions, with the Soviet authorities filling the gap. Their pursuit of newly-enforced taxes during exceedingly difficult times of internal strife and famine galvanized support for the Basmachi. Recognizing the early failed economic policy and seeking an opening with the New Economic Policy; local Bolshevik authorities began to augment the native agriculture efforts. They also put into place a strategy to encourage the mitigation of famine effects with an infusion of assistance. However, while it remained a tough balancing act, the Bolshevik efforts to reinstitute reformed taxation measures in the midst of continued gains in momentum against the Basmachi was an impressive Soviet achievement.

Archival documents of this period stress agriculture as a means of restoring order to the region. In the Ferghana Valley at this time, heavy industry did not have a major role, and agriculture continued to be the main employment in the Ferghana Valley area. Local Bolshevik authorities came to recognize and highlight the cause and effect linkages of the liquidation of Basmachi and swift agriculture recovery. If the Basmachi could swoop down and harass a farmer for crop or livestock requisition, then the Bolshevik authorities would look feckless in the face of the Basmachi resistance. However, if the Bolsheviks could establish a sense of normality by guaranteeing security to the natives that formed the backbone of the agriculture economy, then the natives would be free of harassment and pressures brought on by regional Kurbashi and their bands. This would allow natives to provide for their families and make an honest living without being compelled to support to the Basmachi. This realization aided the case for a steady infusion of resources into the Economic facet of the Red DIME.

The aims of the economic policy are evident from the following list of goals focused mainly on the Namangan region of the Ferghana Valley. In early 1921, regional Bolshevik authorities list these economic-related steps as necessary for regime survival in the Ferghana Valley region:

- A. Regulation and resolution of the use of land and water by the poorest members of the peasantry;
- B. Provision of seeds to the peasants;
- C. Governmental help and assistance provided by financial and economical organizations to the peasantry in order to obtain and install the equipment necessary to become productive;
- D. General enterprises such as: rebuilding an irrigation network for providing the farming community with water, organization of veterinary care, establishment of farm equipment repair shops, organizing pest control measures, organization of medical care in towns, making it easier for the peasantry to communicate with the central farming areas through the repair and rebuilding of the destroyed roads and reinstituting the postal service;
- E. Provide working nomads with land along with some general support, with a goal to settle them in one area by providing them with all the necessities for life.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archives, Fund 435, index me, item 133, sheet 56-69.

A Law regarding Governmental support of sowing the fields with seed, introduced in Turkistan in September of 1919, shows the earliest efforts to reframe failed economic policy. The law exemplifies the push to revive the economic potential of the Ferghana Valley. The law lays out various incentives for households that take certain risks when sowing the fields, especially in the face of widespread famine and crop failure. Specifically, it stated that Ferghana Valley natives should have the opportunity to receive seed sowing equipment and related assistance, with the Soviet Authorities leasing the equipment to the natives. Unfortunately, mitigating circumstances, such as the civil war, meant the law took time to become operational. As the Civil war continued to rage across Russia, it disrupted the ability of Soviet authorities to gain access to agriculture related equipment through the rail network for the desperate, yet far-flung Ferghana Valley.

Despite being slow to get off the ground, the second phase of the seed program was implemented during the fall of 1920 until the fall of 1922. Ferghana Valley authorities continued to assist with the supply of necessary seeds for the sowing season. During this period, famine continued to wreak havoc in the Ferghana Valley, and this program was a proactive attempt to address root issues hindering the agriculture recovery. For the Ferghana Valley, seeding assistance contributed to the successful restoration of the agriculture sector, and the program continued to gain momentum as the decade wore on. In addition, documentation points to locals encouraging the Bolsheviks to assist agriculture sector growth and ensure safe cultivation of their land.<sup>38</sup> The Bolshevik authorities viewed this as a prime opportunity to bolster support from the locals, wean them off their connection to local Basmachi bands, and diminish the ability of the Basmachi to prey on the population. This would grow into a recognizable theme of the Economic facet of the Red DIME.

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<sup>38</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archives, Fund 435, index me, item 43, sheet 73.

The temporary institutions that oversaw this seeding program became known as Seed Sowing Committees [Chezkombeskomov], and they had the lead on seed distribution. Initially, indications are that these Committees were created without much thought or emphasis in regards to experience. Authorities soon recognized that this shortsighted approach impaired the committee's ability to track results, and contributed to an inability to gauge the programs impact. Thus, recognizing the need to increase stress on the right expertise for the committees, the Soviet authorities built a solid foundation of expertise from which the Committees could positively influence Agriculture development.

The percentage of natives in the Ferghana Valley coming and registering for the program gradually increased and the program gained in popularity over time. The Bolshevik authorities in the Ferghana Valley distributed 35,000 Puds [old Russian Unit of weight equal to approximately 36 pounds] of seed in the region in 1921. The collection and study of seed distribution data allowed the Bolshevik authorities to measure the extent of the programs success, and the authorities continued to give additional assistance and increase seed distribution to the more remote corners of the Ferghana Valley. The 58,750 Puds of seed distributed in 1922 was a significant increase over a very short time and attests directly to the popularity of the program with the natives. Additionally, a side component of this seed program systematically distributed approximately 311 horses to assist less fortunate segments of the native farming population. This also assured the Bolshevik authorities that these vulnerable farmers would be less tempted to assist or join the Basmachi, as they now had the means to make a respectable living. Obtaining the goodwill and slowly establishing trust continued to be a crucial facet of the Red DIME effort to gain back the confidence of the population. Injecting stability and growth into the agriculture sector through the seed program, coupled with the continued reconstruction effort aimed at the irrigation canals, allowed native citizens to gradually return to a familiar rhythm while simultaneously diffusing the inclination to support the Basmachi resistance.



By the end of 1922, the Soviet government began to give additional economic power and resources to the provinces. High-level Soviets authorities in Tashkent were able to recognize that local planners in the regions could better gauge and conduct agriculture programming based on available resources. In 1922, Tashkent also provided income from taxes proceeding directly into the coffers of the local village and town committees, so programming could be administered locally, at the provincial level. Allowing village and town committees to manage funds to meet needs of education, health care, social care, and related local capacity building programs would ideally foster a sense of community, and potentially create native ownership. This effort continued as a means to build on success with the natives, and further distance them from the Basmachi resistance.

On the agriculture front, the lack of working equipment and cattle to plow the land hindered the potential for sustainable growth. Authorities from Ferghana Valley continued to plead with regional and national authorities in Tashkent and Moscow, going so far as to petition the Turkistan Congress in 1922 to pay attention to the needs of the agriculture sector in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>39</sup> They identify farm equipment and cattle resources to the Ferghana Valley, and ask that the Congress introduce a law that will support local manufactures of Agriculture equipment. Thus, the local authorities were pressing hard for advantages, as they understood all too well that the positive momentum against the Basmachi by no means guaranteed success, especially without continued effort across the Red DIME. Increased output on the agriculture front put people to work and food on the table.

## **Red Hostage Tactics**

One facet of study regarding the liquidation of the Ferghana Valley Basmachi that has not received sufficient attention is the widespread use of Soviet-sponsored hostage taking to break

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

down the Basmachi resistance. There is archival evidence that hostage taking as policy was crafted in conjunction with high-level directives from Bolshevik Authorities in Moscow. On the surface, this looks like a shift in doctrine and tactics employed during the earlier Tsarist campaigns in the region, although hostage taking was used in Tsarist campaigns in the Caucasus engagements of the late 1800s.

In the Ferghana Valley in 1922, archival documentation portrays hostage taking as a valid instrument at the disposal of Bolshevik Authorities in the Ferghana Valley. They evidently used hostage taking to challenge and combat the effectiveness of top-tier Kurbashi and rank and file Basmachi by neutralizing their support network. Hostages were relatives and family members of known or suspected Kurbashi and Basmachi, or suspect individuals that the Bolshevik authorities viewed providing succor to the Basmachi resistance. Hostage-taking was not a misguided effort of unsupervised local Bolshevik officials. On the contrary, it was, for a period of time, a pivotal Bolshevik strategy against Basmachi support networks, ensnaring relatives, supporters, and the Kurbashi alike in the Ferghana Valley region.

References in the following passage refer directly to a hostage taking directive from the upper echelons of Soviet power, including Leon Trotsky<sup>40</sup>. Archival documents note the following: “The Kurbashi Rahmankul is keeping a close eye over his soldiers. Large segments of his troops are from the local population. As to the order of *Trotsky* [italics mine] to take hostages, the TsIK (Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Government) formed a special commission, which recommended taking Kurbashis’ relatives hostages.”<sup>41</sup> To sum it up, the Bolshevik authorities believed that hostages could be effectively swayed, cajoled, or browbeaten into coming over to the Soviet cause. Persuasion techniques used on the hostages are not spelled out in the archives, but there may have been local techniques employed at the provincial level.

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<sup>40</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 139, sheet 39.

<sup>41</sup> Ferghana Oblast State Archive, Fund 435, index I, item 145, sheet 196-198.

The following passage is from the transcripts of a Ferghana Communist Party of Turkistan meeting. Participants include the influential five regional organizations devoted to the struggle against the Basmachi and the Ferghana Region Department of the GPU (State Political Administration).

**Regarding Hostages:**

Taking hostages has had quite an effect. Since taking hostages, many people sent representatives to their Basmachi, etc... The fact that many people joined the Soviets only after being taken hostage proves that this technique works, and is a very effective tool to use. We stress that we must conduct hostage taking in conjunction with propaganda efforts and synchronize with local authorities and native workers.<sup>42</sup>

The following passage, coupled with the Andijon region hostage chart, shows the extent of Soviet Hostage taking in the Ferghana Valley:

At the beginning, taking hostages had some minor complications. First, all of the lists of the hostages were made and processed by the Regional Revolutionary committees and the Village Revolutionary committees, because otherwise they could have caused a lot of scandal or associated problems if leaked to the natives. On the other hand, Revolutionary committees wanted the local inhabitants to participate in this, as it will have a special political meaning. Thus, responsible native workers are selected to take the hostages.

At the same time there is a wide-ranging campaign [by Soviets authorities] taking place, telling people why they should assist in taking the hostages in cooperation with the Militia. The plan achieved a lot of success, thanks to which we are able to continue it effectively nowadays. So far we have managed to take 105 hostages, and 34 were set free due to their voluntarily switching to our side. This is precisely why they were taken.<sup>43</sup>

**TABLE 1**

***Statistics of Hostages by district in Andijan Region:***

	<i>Number of Hostages Taken</i>	<i>Number of Hostages Released</i>
In Andijan city	58	02
Kok Village District	23	19

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Bytarkarin District	13	11
Harabek District	17	02
Mir-Abad, R. Kazak Center	04	00
TOTAL	105	34

Source: Ferghana Oblast State Archives, Fund 435

## Implications

The Basmachi rebellion is a case study that educates and advances knowledge of unconventional wars. Early, ill-conceived Soviet policy and tactics effectively alienated vast segments of the native population. This led to a total overhaul in how the Soviet authorities in Central Asia approached the problems and shaped the operating environment. Of paramount importance is the critical analysis that allowed for the modification and reinforcement of all elements forming the Red DIME construct. This reshaping of the environment gradually won back the trust and support of key segments of the native population. This in turn allowed the tide to shift convincingly in the Bolsheviks favor.

Furthermore, it is clear the renewed emphasis on unity of effort across all facets of the Soviet apparatus in Central Asia had a resounding impact on the Basmachi liquidation campaign. While friction undoubtedly remained, the major organs of the Soviet power operating in the region, akin to an early version of the modern day U.S. Interagency effort or a Joint Task Force set up to handle a specific set of problems, ultimately pulled victory from the jaws of defeat. In this case, the revamped Red DIME focus dictated that Civilian and Military elements work in conjunction, not in opposition, in order to reach the common Bolshevik goal of Basmachi liquidation in the Ferghana Valley. That belated emphasis on unity of effort is stressed repeatedly

in archival documents, and most certainly has parallels to problems faced by governments engaged in non-conventional warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Yet, while territorial infighting and jostling for position certainly occurred over the duration of the Basmachi liquidation campaign, in the mid-late stages it was clearly not at the destructive levels seen in the early, disjointed years of the campaign. The lesson is the Soviet authorities' ability to adapt, and allow the elements that compose the Red DIME construct to take stock, reflect, and self correct. This is a critical capacity when engaged in a long-term effort to root out an unconventional native resistance movement.

The major themes from the Bolshevik experience in the Ferghana Valley remain especially pertinent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The ability to pull back from flawed policy and initiate a paradigm shift is highly topical in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Stressing the need for a balanced effort from the entire width and breadth of the Government in order to achieve the desired end-state. In order to accomplish this, the Bolsheviks eventually understood that one overarching entity must be in charge, and be afforded the authority to demand and ensure unity of effort. In addition, the Bolsheviks came to recognize that the previously successful European [read Western] model of approach to a foreign society and culture needed to be adjusted and shaped to meet the challenges associated with the dynamic environment. Finally, current Strategic Operational Design (SOD) and Commanders Appreciation of Campaign Design (CACD) efforts parallel the rich design experiences of the Bolsheviks in Central Asia, as the manner of thinking employed bears an uncanny resemblance.

While the Bolshevik authorities undoubtedly encountered additional aches and pains throughout the region in the following decades, they would be minor and manageable. Over the next 70-plus years, the Soviet Ferghana Valley was successfully incorporated into the Soviet Union, becoming an agricultural and natural resource hub that supplied the Soviet machine while forming an integral piece of the once mighty Soviet Union. It would be prudent for Governments involved in 21<sup>st</sup> Century irregular warfare campaigns to take heed of Soviet lessons learned in

their effort to liquidate the native Basmachi Resistance. They maybe old lessons, but they certainly remain applicable.

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## APPENDIX

For centuries, the Ferghana Valley has played a prominent role in Central Asia. It continues to play a fundamental role in not only the state affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but also as a key region with considerable geopolitical implications. The three independent nations with territory in the Ferghana Valley have critical interests in their respective sections of the Ferghana Valley. This is directly linked to the high value that Central Asians place on arable land and water resources. There are high concentrations of both throughout the Ferghana Valley region. The Ferghana Valley makes up roughly 40% of Kyrgyzstan territory and 51% of its population. Some 20% of Tajik territory is located in the Valley and 34% of its population. The Valley makes up only 4% of its total territory, but 25% of the total population of Uzbekistan.<sup>44</sup>

Equally important is the Ferghana Valley is the most fertile area of Central Asia. However, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, this area has been peppered with ethnic violence, radical militant incursions, and a variety of violent regional disputes stemming from access to land and water resources. Thus, it is obvious that the stakes are high for the Central Asian governments that control areas of the Ferghana Valley. Russia, China, and the United States are jockeying for position and influence in the region, keen on gaining access to its abundance of natural resources and proximity to a variety of high interest national objectives.

The complex, tremendously entwined Soviet era Ferghana Valley history serves to directly or indirectly touch almost all the current discord within the region. Both major and minor Soviet-era mapmaking decisions continue to profoundly reverberate throughout the Ferghana Valley long after their introduction. This is especially true since the fall of the Soviet Union, as the divisive borders and boundaries play a monumentally disruptive role within the partitioned valley.

At the same time it is important to recognize the role played by Soviet-backed elites in the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik titular nationalities. The author's recent research and interviews point to their extensive upper-level involvement within the Soviet ranks, which directly influenced the border layout in the Ferghana Valley. Too often, the Soviet national-territorial delimitation, especially in regards to the

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<sup>44</sup> Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming of the Ferghana Valley* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 1999), 34.

Ferghana Valley area (especially the enclaves of Shokimardan, Sokh, and Voruk), is generally explained away as sinister efforts of the Soviet Union or Joseph Stalin with the intention to “divide and rule”. Undoubtedly, there is truth to the previous notion, especially when viewed on an overall, grand scheme level. It is no secret that Stalin and his close advisors exerted major influence in regards to the demarcation endeavors of the overall borders of the early Soviet Union. Yet, these convenient, Moscow based scapegoats continue to be the recipients of too much credit for the current border dilemmas faced throughout the Ferghana Valley. Hirsch contends “The archival record further suggests the classic argument about delimitation, which asserts that Soviet leaders set out to subordinate Central Asia by drawing borders in a way that would intentionally sow discord, misses the mark.”<sup>45</sup>

The shaping of the Ferghana Valley was much more complicated, and often a highly susceptible process that was markedly influenced by a multitude of distinctly local factors. This is due to the fact that it was hardly feasible for the plethora of minor border questions and disputes to be dealt with directly from Moscow. On the contrary, in terms of the Ferghana Valley, significant border adjustments were both initiated and carried out at the behest of local elites. These elites were usually acting on the outcry of a multitude of towns and villages clamoring that they were left outside of what the townspeople perceived to be their titular republic. Almost all information concerning territorial disputes was sent up the chain, eventually reaching the Central Executive Committee (TsIK), which was delegated the cumbersome task of continuing the work that the national-territorial delimitation had started.

More specifically, evidence points to local elites hailing from the Ferghana Valley using both their influence and authority within the Soviet system to both pressure and cajole various territorial claims into actual territorial acquisitions and exchanges. The focus falls on two specific individuals: First Secretary Yuldash Akhunbabev of the Uzbek SSR, and First Secretary Abdikadir Oruzbekov of the Kyrgyz ASSR. Their alleged engagement in the mutual exchange of disputed border territories, both during and after the official 1924-1927 Soviet national-territorial delimitations.<sup>46</sup>

It is essential to take an in-depth look at the process by which the Ferghana Valley was reallocated, under the Soviet Unions rule, to fully comprehend today’s issues. During the Imperial Russian administration, this swath of Central Asian territory, previous under the dominion of the Kokand Khanate, was generally referred to as Turkistan. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Imperial Russian administration did not concentrate their attention on the formal construction of borders and boundaries within Central Asia. Instead, the Russian authorities tended to focus their energies on the development of rail links to Russia, improving upon and creating basic infrastructure and roads, and improving agricultural output. However, the Soviet design of constructing titular nations within the region was a major departure from the manner in which Imperial Russia had controlled the region and its people. Francine Hirsch, in “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” comments “the Soviet approach to the region was markedly different from that of the late-Imperial regime, which had fluctuated between a policy of association (religious and cultural toleration and administrative integration) and a policy which might be characterized as ‘single assimilation’ (Russification).” Following the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet authorities were initially working with very limited resources. At some point, they decided to initiate the national-territorial demarcation, drawing borders over the already existing system of roads, rails, and canals inherited from Imperial Russia after the revolution. This was not too cumbersome an arrangement during the 70 years of Soviet control in Central Asia, with one unifying force utilizing the entangled system of infrastructure, and simultaneously maintaining order in the region. Soviet Central Asian republics in many ways were encouraged to function as a collective unit, with each country relying on the other for vital goods and services.<sup>47</sup>

The strains on the system following independence shattered any semblance of the Soviet era solidarity, leaving behind a infrastructural spider web of roads, railways, pipes, and canals which were artfully spun during the Soviet era, and zigzagged across the now internationally recognized borders and

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<sup>45</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Cornell University Press (2005), 161.

<sup>46</sup> Author, *Fulbright Scholar Research*, 2002-2003, Ferghana, Uzbekistan.

<sup>47</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities*, *The Russian Review* 59, (April 2000): 201-226.



boundaries. While the location of key infrastructure is a main component of the complicated legacy of Soviet rule, the introduction and encouragement of titular nations and identities also irrevocably changed the atmosphere within the Ferghana Valley. Up until the rise of the Bolsheviks in Turkistan, Central Asians tended to identify themselves on the basis of their religious practice, place of settlement (cities, villages, or nomadic encampment), locale or region, and family or clan affiliation.<sup>48</sup> In response, numerous Soviet policies were shrewdly implemented in order to turn the potentially destabilizing situation in the Soviet authorities favor. In one such adjustment, as Martha Brill Olcott notes in a Foreign Affairs article entitled “Central Asia’s Catapult to Independence”, the Soviet government (in the hopes of reducing the possibility of a Pan-Turkic movement that could threaten Moscow’s control) emphasized the development of links between individual republics and Moscow, rather than with neighboring republics.<sup>49</sup> It’s also clear that Stalin’s 1924 nation territorial policy further undermined existing regional power structures, and weakened the ethnic cohesion that had existed prior to the Soviet arrival.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of this, Francine Hirsch cautions that “national-territorial delimitation of Central Asian should not be dismissed as a devious strategy of ‘divide and rule’ or accepted as proof of the Soviet regime’s ‘ethnophilia,’ but instead should be understood as a manifestation of the Soviet regime’s attempt to define a new (and presumably non-imperialistic) model of colonization (kolonizatsiia).”<sup>51</sup> Her work on the 1924-1927 national delimitation processes in Central Asia does an excellent job of flushing out the various fissures that were created as a result of the delimitation process. These fissures tended to manifest themselves in the form of petitions by residents of various titular groups who found themselves in villages and towns outside of what they perceived believed to be their rightful titular republic.

While the exact logic and intentions behind the Soviet demarcation effort remains a contentious issue, the results are evident. Over the ensuing years, Soviet policy created Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks, Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz, and others out of more fragmented and fluid identities that had existed earlier.<sup>1</sup> This policy brought about the gradual transformation of the Ferghana Valley from a relatively cohesive unit that functioned as a whole, to that of a mutually dependent unit constructed and assisted under the guise of Soviet solidarity, and finally resulted in the fractured, and ill-functioning modern layout brought by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Intentionally or not, and in spite of many spirited petitions from local inhabitants, the national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia left many Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks and other ethnic groups outside the boundaries of their respective titular nation. Granted, just about any border design would have been insufficient in dealing with the diverse ethnic composition of the Ferghana Valley. However, the precise nature in which the borders were demarcated, sometimes slicing well within neighboring territories, remains a highly contentious issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>49</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s Catapult to Independence*, Foreign Affairs 71:3 (Summer 1992) 108.

<sup>50</sup> Mehrdad Haghighy, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995) 169.

<sup>51</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities*, The Russian Review 59, (April 2000): 202.